

N.I.B. BULLETINS

No. 3.

GARDENING

FOR THE BLIND

by

J. ERNEST SUTCLIFFE

with an Introduction by

BEATRICE DUNCOMBE

(Founder of the Guild of Blind Gardeners)

and Chapters on

The Kitchen Garden, by Frank Eyre

and

Teaching the Young, by Ada Byron

Price 3d.

Published by the

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND

(Registered under the Blind Persons Act, 1920)

224-6-8, Great Portland Street, London, W.1

HV1711

N213

~~2003~~

5483

The Coming of June

By

Margaret Brand

Come into the garden, for Titania's dancing,
Dancing to the piping of the great god Pan !
See the marble horses round the fountain prancing,
Never was such piping since the world began.

Honeysuckle, lavender, and dark red roses,
Mignonette and rosemary, and faint sweet peas ;
Breathing out their perfume as each cadence closes,
Breathing out their perfume on the soft, warm breeze.

Caterpillars, butterflies, and wee, shy crickets,
Ladybirds, and dragon-flies, and big, brown bees ;
Hurrying from hedgerows and from dark garden thickets,
Flitting in the shadow of the tall beech trees.

Come and let us join them ere the music's over,
Come and let us listen to the haunting tune ;
Dance amid the fragrance of the dew-kissed clover,
Dance, for summer's with us, and it's June—yes, June !

The above poem, written by a blind girl of 17, was awarded the first prize in a junior literary competition organised by the National Institute for the Blind in 1931.

[The authoress, Margaret Brand, was a former pupil of the Guild of Blind Gardeners].

HV 1711
N 213
S 083

The Guild of Blind Gardeners

(Registered under the Blind Persons Act, 1920)

Affiliated to the National Institute for the Blind

Founder :

Mrs. Adolphus Duncombe.

President :

The Lady Irwin.

Vice-Presidents :

The Duchess of Sutherland.
The Duchess of Norfolk.
The Earl of Dysart.
The Lord Algernon Percy
The Viscountess Powerscourt.
The Lady Bertha Dawkins
Capt. Sir Beachcroft Towse, v.c.,
K.C.V.O., C.B.E.

Sir Daniel Hall, F.R.S.
Sir John Russell, F.R.S.
P. H. Adams, Esq., F.R.C.S.
G. Cochrane, Esq.
Col. R. H. Elliott, F.R.C.S.
Hubert Greenwood, Esq., L.C.C.
Mrs. Heber Percy
Courtney Page, Esq.

Council :

Cecil M. Chapman, Esq., J.P. (*Chairman*).

Mrs. Adolphus Duncombe
Dr. A. Eicholz, M.D.
Mrs. A. E. Everett.
Mrs. E. P. Granet.
Mrs. J. Holden.
W. Maxwell-Lyte, Esq.
The Lady Robb
Rev. H. S. Sard, M.A.

J. E. Sutcliffe, Esq.
Miss B. Talbot.
W. Talbot, Esq., C.I.E.
Miss A. E. Tomes.
Capt. Sir Beachcroft Towse, v.c.,
K.C.V.O., C.B.E.
H. J. Wagg, Esq., O.B.E.
Mrs. R. Wombwell.

Hon. Treasurer :

Sir Harry Cordeaux, K.C.M.G., C.B.

Secretary :

Lt.-Col. R. A. Bradley, C.M.G.

Superintendent :

Miss A. Byron.

Hon. Solicitors :

Messrs. Royds, Rawstorne & Co., 46, Bedford Square, W.C.1.

Hon. Auditors :

Messrs. W. B. Keen & Co., 23, Queen Victoria Street, E.C.4.

Office : 224, Great Portland Street, London, W.1.

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10011



MRS. ADOLPHUS DUNCOMBE
Founder of the Guild of Blind Gardeners

Mrs. Duncombe, who contributes the following Introduction to this booklet, was President of the Guild of Blind Gardeners from 1921 to 1931 inclusive. She is the founder of a movement which, it is hoped, will bring health and happiness to thousands of blind people throughout the world

Introduction

By BEATRICE DUNCOMBE.

THIS booklet is the result of an adventure in mercy which was started shortly after the conclusion of the Great War. I think that everyone who loves a garden will read it with interest. I am sure that everyone who realises the terrible handicap of blindness will read it with sympathy.

There is no cause that the thinking world studies with greater compassion than that of the alleviation of the hardships of the blind. Great progress has been made in the training of the blind in indoor occupations, but it is only during the last few years that the necessity for providing suitable forms of recreation for the blind in the open air has begun to be realised.

Students of the blind problem recognise that it is not sufficient to provide a blind person with a trade. Basket-making, knitting, typing, mat-making and similar occupations may occupy a good portion of the day, but there are many other hours outside the hours of sleep which have to be filled in. Various forms of recreation must be devised to while away these weary hours, the difficulty being to find any type of recreation which does not involve constant supervision and attention by sighted friends.

The possibilities of gardening as a safe and healthy recreation for the totally blind, and a means of livelihood for the partially blind, have been carefully explored during the past few years by a small band of social workers, and the object of this booklet is to place the experience which has been gained in this way at the disposal of the blind world.

The subject of gardening for the blind was first ventilated at the Ophthalmological Congress at Oxford

in July, 1919. At this Congress I had the honour of reading a paper based on my own experience as a lover of gardens who became blind in middle life. At the time I read this paper I had been quite blind for about two years. I described at this Congress how I had continued to practise gardening during many years of decreasing vision, being convinced that what one had done as a child and carried on through life, might be continued so long as physical strength permitted. I found it possible to prune roses and make cuttings, to sow seeds and to prune fruit trees such as apples, pears, plums and cherries. I was also able to thin out the various fruits and vegetables. These were occupations which could be done with little or no vision. The work brought an interest and healthy pleasure into a life which otherwise might have become despondent and useless.

In considering a problem of this nature it is interesting to note how the material profit is often the only aspect considered. How much money can be made out of it? Will it produce a living? People who ask these questions must not overlook the physical and psychological benefits. A man's soul is of more importance to him than his body and I, therefore, put the psychological benefit first.

The gradual unfolding of Nature's secrets and the expansion of mind and thought make gardening a fascinating allurements. Here is something which touches man in his very being. A blind man, or woman, soon learns that there is something higher and better in the cultivation of a potato than its mere market value. The composition and properties of soils, the aspect and surroundings of a plot of ground, the varying climate in different corners of a garden, all these are a study and education in themselves.

The reading of my paper and the subsequent discussion at the Oxford Congress led to the formation of a Guild to encourage the teaching of elementary horticulture among blind and partially blind children

and adults. This Guild, which is known as the Guild of Blind Gardeners, is now affiliated to the National Institute for the Blind and has its headquarters at 224, Great Portland Street. Particulars of its activities will be found in the Appendix at the end of this booklet.

When the Guild of Blind Gardeners was first started, its efforts met with a certain amount of scepticism. We set to work, however, organising gardening classes for blind and partially blind children and, as a result of twelve years' experience, we are satisfied that gardening, as a recreation, is a practical proposition for any blind person of ordinary physique and intelligence. What is, perhaps, more important, we have found that partially blind boys and girls can be trained and fitted for horticulture as a livelihood.

This subject must be regarded from various angles. We have to consider the case of the totally blind man or woman and that of the individual who suffers from myopia in a greater or less degree. In between these there are many grades of blindness. For the totally blind, gardening can seldom be more than a useful and health-giving hobby; even then there is an overwhelmingly strong case for encouraging this hobby if only for the health and happiness which it brings.

One of the greatest disabilities of blindness is the constant sense of dependence on others. Nearly all blind people will, I think, agree that it is irksome to have to submit one's will and every little action that one cannot perform independently to the guidance of a sighted friend. This sense of dependence on others disappears entirely in a garden. Here one is free to do what one likes when one likes and how one likes. Obviously, to enjoy a garden properly, one must have some elementary knowledge of horticulture, but there is no reason why practical instruction in gardening should not form part of the curriculum in every School for the Blind.

May I venture to commend this proposal to Education Authorities?

Another strong argument in favour of gardening is its safety. In these days of fast motors and inconsiderate drivers no blind person can venture on the highway without a sighted guide. On the other hand, a blind man can work in a garden to which he is accustomed without any fear of accidents. His relations and friends can leave him in the garden happily employed for hours on end. The same, of course, applies to blind women and children.

I have already alluded to the physical benefits of gardening. There is no better exercise than digging and, although I cannot see them, I am assured that the rosy complexions of some of the blind members of the Guild are in marked contrast to the sallow appearance of the majority of blind people who suffer from a want of proper exercise.

For the partially blind, especially those suffering from scarred eyes or stationary myopia, gardening offers real opportunities for making a living. Unfortunately, owing to the absence of any organisation for providing employment for pupils of the Guild, it has only been possible, so far, to place a few of them on farms or with horticultural firms. Excellent reports, however, have been received in every case. Extracts from these will be found in the Appendix.

The lot of the partially sighted boy or girl who is not sufficiently blind as to be certified as such, is especially hard. These children have to compete in the open market with others who are not similarly handicapped. They receive no grants or aid from the State and no organisation exists to help them in their hard struggle for existence. Few trades or professions are suitable for them. The myope, particularly, should be very careful in the choice of his employment. If he takes unsuitable work in dark or unhealthy surroundings he may lose his sight altogether. On the other hand, a healthy outdoor employment, such as gardening, tends to preserve and may even improve his sight.

One of the most urgent needs at the moment is a horticultural training centre for these children after they leave school. Few gardeners care to employ a boy under sixteen years of age and although children in Schools for the Blind can remain at school until this age, their parents usually prefer to take them away—this means that when these boys leave school they are obliged to take any work which can be found for them and so lose touch with their idea of going on the land. The difficulty of bridging these critical years, 14 to 16, is one of our greatest problems, and until funds are forthcoming for the organisation and equipment of a residential training centre, no great progress in this part of our work can be expected. To found and equip such a school, is a ready-made opportunity for a wealthy philanthropist.

Mr. Sutcliffe, a blind member of our Guild, who was a skilled botanist before blindness overtook him, describes in the following pages how he has successfully overcome his handicap. His experience, as a practical gardener, will be found invaluable to all who feel a desire to follow in his footsteps.

Mr. Eyre, another blind member of our Guild, contributes an interesting chapter on vegetable gardening, at which he is an adept.

The chapter on "Teaching the Young," written by Miss Byron, who has had more than six years' experience of this work, contains valuable hints and advice.

I earnestly invite all those who have the welfare of the blind at heart to study the following pages. I think that many will be amazed at the vista of happiness which this subject opens up. Others may well feel surprised that so little has been done as yet to bring the benefits of gardening to the notice of the blind. The Guild of Blind Gardeners has sown the good seed. It remains for others to tend the good seed which we have sown, to water it and bring it to fruition.

Gardening for the Blind

By J. ERNEST SUTCLIFFE.

I — The Need for Training

THE following chapters are intended to serve as an introduction to the study and practice of gardening by totally-blind or partially-blind individuals who have no knowledge of the subject. I have chiefly in mind the many thousands of my companions in blinkers, scattered throughout the British Isles, from whom the joys of garden-work are hidden, and who may be led by the perusal of the following pages to the love of that larger garden of Nature, where invigoration of mind and body are best sought.

To those who are unacquainted with blindness, the possibility of gardening under such a disability appears fantastic. Yet there are isolated blind and partially-blind people, in many of the English counties, who, by cultivation of vegetables, flowers, or fruit, derive physical, mental, and monetary profit in varying degrees. I wish that every one of this handicapped community could have the opportunity to test the value of gardening, and to cultivate, should he so desire, his own vegetable patch, or flower garden.

Most of the blind, alas ! live narrow, circumscribed lives, in large towns where vocational training and employment are available, and have not even an elementary knowledge of gardening or of nature lore. In such cases, it is for the Institution or Workshop management to provide both the facilities and the stimulus. A patch of ground, or a neighbouring allotment, might be rented, where blind men and women could be taken individually, or in small numbers, and taught the use of the commoner garden tools, and the various methods of digging and trenching. No amount of written instruction would serve the purpose.



Mr. Ernest Sutcliffe at work in his garden.



Better than lessons !

**Three happy young
gardeners at the
Myopic School at
Battersea.**



Blind but happy !

**A little gardener
at Islington.**

Considerable help could be obtained from neighbouring allotment holders who are, as my experience goes to prove, sociable creatures, with a turn for gossip and a keen desire to give advice. No blind man in difficulties with his allotment, owing to lack of experience, need fear that he will be left unaided. Information as to the best variety of cabbage or of cauliflower to suit the particular locality is quickly vouchsafed, and hints about digging, trenching, manuring, and the like, are always forthcoming.

The average educated blind man is able to find his way alone in surroundings which are familiar and therefore visualised. He is quick of ear, he shaves, reads Braille with sufficient speed to give pleasure to himself and to those who care to listen, and he writes his letters on an ordinary typewriter. Similarly, the trained blind woman, in addition to most of the foregoing, is able to work most intricate patterns in hand or machine knitting, and to perform most household duties which are supposed to need sight. To such people, gardening, in its limited and specialised sense, offers no insuperable difficulties.

As to the need for physical exercise in the open air, there cannot be two opinions. Blindness inevitably imposes limitations. On every hand, one finds doors closed to activities and pleasures formerly enjoyed or enviously desired. Experience and resource enable one to open these doors, one by one, and so to regain part, at least, of the lost or coveted freedom. Much has been done of late years by the managers of Schools and Colleges for the Blind to stimulate outdoor sports, such as rowing and swimming, and one is glad to learn of the establishment of rambling clubs. But there is a decided tendency to seek one's pleasures and occupations indoors, with a resultant deterioration of physique. Among men, "My Lady Nicotine" gets far more attention than does the truly fragrant weed. To counteract this tendency, one needs not only outdoor exercise, but an outdoor occupation, of compelling

interest, which shall survive youth. Such an occupation, to my mind, is gardening and its allied pursuits.

To get the best results in the teaching of gardening one must start with the young. At an early age, blind children should be taught the use of simple garden tools, should each be allowed to cultivate a tiny plot of land, and should be taught, also, the rudiments of botany and nature lore. A knowledge of plant structure and functions, and especially an insight into the marvellous inter-relation of plant and insect life, add enormously to the interest of a garden.

It was my good fortune, years ago, to be the witness of a remarkable exhibition of identification by the famous blind botanist of Leeds, Mr. Grimshaw Wilkinson, who was awarded the degree of Master of Science at Leeds University for his botanical work. I was in the Lake District with a party of young students, under the leadership of one who was perhaps the best-known field botanist of his day in the North of England. While foraging in a wayside copse, I encountered a botanist who was obviously blind, and was so interested that I took him in tow for the rest of the day, little dreaming that in a few years' time I should need similar guidance.

A dispute arose as to the identification of a species of *Orchis*, which could only be distinguished from a closely-allied form by a minute difference in the flower. To detect this difference, it was necessary to use a pocket-lens. The plant, it should be noted, had been incorrectly named by our leader after a cursory examination. To my amazement, Mr. Wilkinson thrust his tongue into the corolla of the flower, detected the minute difference, and proved the sighted botanist to be wrong.

Few blind gardeners can attain to such skill ; but it is a goal at which to aim.

II — Digging and Planting

I AM assuming that all information as to the kind of plants to be cultivated will be obtained locally. It is sufficient for me to give hints as to the various methods by which a blind gardener may overcome his disability.

The garden or allotment should be visualised, and made so familiar that it is actually seen in the mind's eye. Every tree, every shrub, each herbaceous or vegetable patch should be located in order to facilitate movement. Various means have been suggested for assisting the blind gardener to pick his way about a garden. Some have been assisted by having flat stones of irregular shape placed at intervals on the paths. A friend of mine, who owns a large fruit plantation, has hit upon the ingenious idea of connecting all his trees by a thick strand of galvanised wire. In gardens of average size, however, the trees and the larger plants themselves furnish all the guidance that is necessary, and obviate the need of erecting posts which are an eyesore to the sighted visitor, and an indication that the garden is unusual. In a large garden such as mine, there was considerable difficulty at first, until the noises from the nearest road, the distant railway, and the neighbouring hill gave me my bearings.

On one occasion in the early days, I had wandered far from the house, and after colliding with a tree I was deflected from my course. Walking aimlessly about in search of a landmark to guide me, I was delighted to hear the emptying of the bath-water from the house. The flow continued sufficiently long, fortunately, to enable me to find a familiar pathway.

By way of compensation for his disabilities, the blind gardener has many advantages over his sighted rival. The latter is compelled to "down tools" with the fading light, while the former is not at all hampered. There is a special delight to the man who spends his days in the noise and bustle of a great city, to be able to return home in the evening, and to seek healing

peace and recreation in the solitude of the night-garden. At this time there is about the garden a solemnity and stillness, disturbed only by the rustle of leaves trembling in an imperceptible breeze. The scent of flowers, too, is more evident, and is a welcome substitute for the petrol fumes of the town. Occasionally an owl flies screeching by, or a horse pushes an inquisitive nose through the hedge, surprised at the unusual sound of fork or spade in the pitch darkness.

This recalls an early adventure when digging close to the hedge in my garden late at night. I felt, rather than heard, a presence near me, and upon stopping work to listen more intently, I was startled by a loud snort and a shower of spray. Not realising that it was a friendly horse in the field beyond the hedge, I dropped my fork and raced towards the house, only to return laughing when I realised who the "demon" was. These are some of the joys I would gladly share with my handicapped brothers and sisters.

Vegetable or flower beds should be only a few yards wide, if possible, and bounded on the left and right by a path or fence. Several methods have been suggested to enable the gardener to keep a straight line in digging. The use of a plank which may be turned over as the digging proceeds, is advocated by some gardeners ; but I have never found this method a success. If the ground be uneven, as is commonly the case when digging or re-digging, the plank is sure to get out of alignment. I prefer small wooden posts placed in the ground to the right and left of the area to be dug. The posts are connected by thick cord, which is wound many times around each post, and which may be lengthened or shortened by the simple process of twisting the posts inwards or outwards. Putting the spade or fork over the string, I dig along its length, removing the posts about nine inches backwards when the previous row has been dug. To facilitate movement, I use cricket wickets, which are already pointed, as posts, and check the alignment of each new row by the fence or path.

Care must be taken to replace the tools in their customary quarters, otherwise they will be lost. Such advice is hardly needed for the blind man who crawled many times on his hands and knees in the vain search for a missing collar-stud, before he learned the wisdom of tidiness.

The posts and line are also used in planting. Assuming that the ground has been well dug, manured and levelled, the posts are placed in position. A rough measurement of the space to be left between each plant may be made with whatever tool is in use, whether it be trowel, spade, or fork. Obviously, the fewer tools in use for any gardening operation, the less risk there is of losing them. In the absence of tools, measurement may be made by the hand, fore-arm or foot.

Transplanting is difficult, and should not be attempted seriously without much practice. It is advisable to leave the seedlings which are to be transplanted until they are much bigger than the size required by the sighted gardener before they are moved. The common method for sowing carrots may very well be extended, so far as we are concerned, to many other vegetables. Carrot seeds (mixed with sand) are sown as sparsely as possible in shallow drifts, and covered with a thin layer of soil, which is pressed firm. When the seedlings have made a little growth, and the roots are the size of small fingers, most of them should be taken up and used for salad, leaving a few seedlings, a foot apart, to grow to their maximum size.

III — Weeding

To distinguish between the plant one wishes to cultivate and the weed which one seeks to destroy, is usually regarded by sighted people as being difficult, if not impossible, for the blind gardener. As is so often the case, closer study proves that the admitted difficulties may be overcome.

For example, the position of the weed is a good guide. The plants in the beds are known, and as they are placed in rows or clumps, it follows that any plant which is out of alignment is, for our purpose, a weed. If there is a doubt about it, it is easy to examine the neighbouring plants, and so discover which is the intruder. It is not necessary to identify the weed by name, though that is desirable, on the principle that it is advisable to know one's enemies and their habits. In the cabbage patch, to take a simple example, where the plants are sown in rows, it is only necessary to recognise the cabbage. All other vegetation is weed, and should be removed.

There are many varieties of weeds which are common to the whole country, but each locality has its own specialities. In my garden, the field poppy and that beautiful cousin of the foxglove, mullein, are very common. The poppy is easily identified, for its pendulous flower-buds cannot be mistaken for those of any other garden flower. The bindweed is another weed which is easily identified. Its long, thread-like roots travel underground, sending up here and there rosettes of leaves from which spring the thread-like stems which are ever ready to clamber over any neighbouring plant. Bindweed does not waste precious material in making a sturdy flower-stem, but utilises the support of a bush or tall perennial to carry its flowers to the sunshine. By passing the hand around the base of a bush or other large plant, the thread-like stems of the bindweed may be found and removed. I am told that if the plant is prevented from making

the rosettes of leaves it will eventually die ; but my experience goes to prove that the plant is “ unconscionably long a-dying.”

The plantain in its three common varieties may be detected by the harsh texture of the leaves, which are in rosettes pressed close to the ground. From the centre of each rosette rises a supple flowering-stem surmounted by a hard “ head.” Dandelions, buttercups, daisies, groundsel, chickweed, docks, etc., all have their characteristics for the blind gardener, though they cannot be included among easily identified weeds. As for stinging-nettles and thistles, they may be relied upon to introduce themselves. The stinging-nettle, however, is only to be found in neglected corners, or amongst currant and raspberry bushes. When once discovered, it is advisable to wear gloves if one intends to dig it up. Garden-gloves are as much a handicap to the blind as is the dusk to the sighted gardener. The nettle is, therefore, a nuisance. The thistle is identified by the slightest touch, and with care, one may grasp it by the collar—which is the junction of stem and root and is free from spines—and drag the whole plant out, loosening the soil with a fork lest there be a fragment of root left behind.

IV — Watering

It is imperative that seedlings and young plants should be well watered and kept moist ; but opinion is sharply divided on the question of watering young trees and established plants, even in a season of drought. Some gardeners advocate keeping the surface soil open with the hoe—an operation which calls for skill and care on the part of the blind gardener. For him, a short-handled hoe is necessary, especially in crowded parts of the garden. In this matter, as in others, one must be guided by the local conditions, the nature of the soil and the drainage. Here, in Hertfordshire, where the soil is 50 per cent. gravel, and extremely porous, watering is essential for all shallow-rooting plants even in normal seasons. In times of drought, even shrubs and young trees must be watered, or their leaves soon flag.

In watering the garden, as in other operations, one is guided very largely by sound. The approximate position of every tree is known, and may be located by directing the jet of water from the hose on to the leaves. The patter of spray quickly reveals the position. A quick lateral or right and left movement produces a spitting sound whenever the jet reaches the stem. Once that is found, it is a simple matter to lower the hose to the foot of the tree, where it may be left to do its work.

To manipulate my 50 yards of hose was not an easy matter at first. I found it useless to take short cuts across the garden dragging the hose after me, and I quickly learned that one must follow the paths, and take care not to drag the hose across precious plants or over corners. The hose, by the way, is, in my opinion, the Puck of garden appliances. It has a trick of simulating death, and as one stoops to discover the kink which caused the stoppage, the playful imp starts into vindictive life, and gives his master a douching. At other times, when carelessly held, it revolves in the hand, mischievously spraying the gardener.

V — Grass-Cutting

AFTER a little practice, the difficulties of grass-cutting may be overcome, although there is danger at first of damaging the blades of the mower by running into small stones, which all too frequently are encountered on the lawns. The machine, therefore, should be heavily-built and inexpensive. The one I have used for the past year cost only a guinea, and, in spite of hard usage, week by week, is still in excellent order. It is necessary to ascertain the position of the holes in the machine, through which the various running parts are oiled ; and the machine should never be put away wet, dirty or unoiled.

It is not possible in cutting grass to keep a straight line, nor is it essential to the operation. A little practice will enable one to detect the difference in sound between the whirring of the blades when cutting or when revolving freely. When cutting, too, the machine is harder to push owing to the increased resistance. Without stooping to feel with the hands, it is possible to tell whether or not any particular area of lawn has been cut ; just as it is possible to distinguish by the tread the difference between a cheap carpet and a long-haired rug.

All edges must be kept trim by the use of the small shears. In this work, I use either a kneeling mat, or a child's chair to which a flat wooden base has been fitted, so as to avoid making holes in the lawn. The kneeling mat and the chair provide change of position, which is very desirable for the blind gardener who must do so much stooping. A pail or basket should accompany the worker, so that all cuttings may be gathered up at once, leaving the margins tidy. Circles round all trees must be kept free from grass by the use of a small fork, and the edges of the circles should be trimmed.

Just as the cutting of lavender is perhaps the most pleasant of harvesting operations, so is the cutting of grass the most pleasant of weekly jobs, provided one has a keen nose to appreciate the characteristic sweet smell of newly-cut grass.

VI — Specialised Culture

FOR our purpose, the best results are probably to be achieved by specialised culture ; that is to say, by concentrating on the cultivation of one or two varieties of plants. This familiarises one with all the characteristics of the plant grown and studied, helps in the detection of weeds, and minimises the handicap of blindness. As a suitable subject for experiment I would recommend the growth of lavender.

From my own experience, which is happily far from being unique, I have proved that every stage in the cultivation and preparation of lavender can be performed by a blind person with a little experience. The digging and manuring of the ground, the plating of the bushes, their propagation by cuttings which readily root in the Autumn, the cutting of the flowering stems when the flowers are ripe, the drying of the flowers, and, finally, the making and filling of lavender bags, may all be done without assistance. The lavender bush is admirably suited for our purpose. It is large, heavily-scented, and its flowering stems rise like delicate spires well above the foliage. The bees, by their incessant buzzing, give the signal when the flowers are beginning to open, and when the stems are fluffy to the very top they should be cut. Even the stalks are useful, for they serve as a deodoriser, when lighted and carried about a room. Thrown upon the fire in Winter evenings, they fill the room with a fragrant reminder of Summer past, and promise of Summer to come.

As an occupation for partially-blind people, I think that the growth and sale of lavender should be seriously considered by those who are now seeking new occupations for the blind. I can think of no more agreeable occupation for blind women than the making and filling of lavender bags, and I feel sure that if the lavender were to be put up in small attractive packets, accompanied by a guarantee that they were entirely the product of blind labour, they would have a ready sale

at our Institutions throughout the country. The substitution of small packets or bags of lavender for Christmas Cards should not be overlooked.

It would be of great assistance in fostering the practice of gardening, if the Blind Institutions throughout the country could be induced to receive cut flowers, fruit, etc., from the growers and to guarantee sale. The sale of vegetables is, of course, out of the question ; but the managers of resident Institutions would probably be willing to purchase regularly the surplus produce of any blind gardener in the neighbourhood.

Dried lavender flowers, however, being extremely light in weight, would yield a sufficient price to pay for postage to the nearest selling agency. Instructions as to the preparation of lavender flowers, free from stalk or leaf, should be sent to interested persons, in order to save labour and trouble to those who are responsible for the sale.

Neapolitan and Parma Violets may be grown in a shady corner of the garden in Summer, and transferred to a cold frame in the Autumn, for Christmas flowering. These are not difficult to cultivate, and have a ready sale.

Among other plants suitable for specialised culture are the numerous varieties used for Winter decoration, such as Sea Lavender (*Statice*), Cape Gooseberry or Chinese Lanterns (*Physalis*), Sneezewort (*Globe Thistle Echinops*), Honesty (*lunaria*), and Pampas Grass. Most of these plants can be grown in the North as well as in the South of England, and are very attractive in the dried state. Throughout the whole Winter they keep their flowers and their colour-essential qualities in the view of the housewife.

VII — The Choice of a Garden

To most of my readers the choice of a garden is as impossible as the choice of parents—one must be content to till the available plot, whether it be cottage garden or allotment.

The larger the garden, the more need for simplicity in the lay-out. Herbaceous borders and rockeries require a great deal of attention, and should be reduced to the minimum. Lawns are not difficult to manage, provided one is physically equal to the laborious but pleasant work of using the mower and the roller. For the blind gardener, it is not well to have the mower and roller combined, as a light machine is much easier to manipulate. Shrubberies, especially those consisting of flowering bushes or of conifers (Cypresses, Pines, Firs, etc.), are ideal, and should be developed to the full. Flowering shrubs are easily distinguished; the surrounding earth may be quickly weeded with a fork, and there is small danger of damaging the plants. The shrubberies, too, may be kept tidy with the hoe during the Summer, while in the Autumn the fallen leaves may be forked lightly into the ground. A variety of such shrubs may be obtained cheaply, from any nurseryman, to give a succession of bloom from early Spring to late Autumn. Amongst my favourites are *Forsythia Spectabilis*, which is covered with yellow blossoms in early Spring before the leaves are out, *Prunus* or Flowering Plum, with its dark purple foliage, *Siberian Crab*, *Buddleia*, with its long racemes of blue flowers, *Double Cherry*, *Pyrus Japonica*, *Syringa*, *Double Lilac*, *Berberis*, *Veronica* and *Broom*. The choice, however, is endless.

My own garden and orchard comprise over half-an-acre, and include herbaceous borders, rockeries, rose-beds, fruit trees, lawns, shrubberies, and a vegetable plot. Frankly, it would be impossible for a blind gardener to keep such a garden in perfect order, even if he were to devote his whole time to it. I employ

a gardener for one day a week, and I spend most of my evenings and week-ends at the work. If I were called upon to manage a garden of such a size entirely alone, I should re-arrange it completely. Most of the herbaceous borders and rockeries would have to go, and be replaced by either shrubberies or lawn.

The reader who has followed me thus far will, I hope, be convinced of the possibility of performing, unaided, most of the routine jobs of gardening, such as the staking of perennials in the Summer and their division in the Autumn, the simpler forms of pruning and spraying, and the destruction of perennial weeds or hedge-cuttings by means of the bonfire. Newspapers made into long rolls and then tied make excellent fire-lighters—though some Daily Papers are naturally more inflammable than others ! Braille magazines, separated into single sheets and rolled, burn splendidly, for the paper is made of manilla fibre. The making of the bonfire, which is a pleasant occupation in Winter evenings, gives a welcome change from other garden work, and can be performed, without risk, in any temporarily-vacant part of the vegetable plot. The resultant grey wood-ash is a most valuable fertiliser, and should be carefully collected while still dry. If allowed to become wet, the valuable potash constituent is carried away and lost. In the Winter season, I carefully sieve the wood-ash free from partially burnt stems, etc., and place it in boxes in the shed, until it is required to re-fertilise some exhausted border or vegetable plot.

Hedges, which are usually overgrown at the end of the Autumn, can be cut back fairly evenly, by walking along their length, moving a stick up and down all the time, and cutting off all projecting shoots with shears or sécateurs.

With each succeeding year of experience, jobs which were, at first, regarded as impossible are found to be feasible ; and thus the work becomes increasingly more extensive and varied.

The Kitchen Garden

By FRANK EYRE.

GARDENING is a perfectly practicable occupation for blind people who have any inclination in that direction. No better testimony is needed than my assurance that during the past twelve years of total blindness I have produced sufficient culinary vegetables to maintain an ample supply of all kinds for domestic use all the year round. In addition to the home supply, I always have an appreciable surplus available for gifts and for sale. Let me add that I am able to perform every sort of work required, from digging to the harvesting of the crop. I have at times had sighted assistance at hoeing time, *but last season when illness rendered this help unavailable, no hand touched my garden but my own.*

At the present time, February, I can go into my garden to cut a cabbage or a savoy, gather kale or Brussel tops, dig parsnips and leeks or a head of celery. In store are potatoes, carrots, beet and shallots in ample supply. The shallots are set for the new crop, and the first broad beans are sown. Spring cabbage and broccoli, which have been standing the Winter through, will soon be growing and "hearting in." Onion seedlings will soon be ready to plant out. Strawberry plants and rhubarb stools are each mulched with a little manure to keep them warm and will soon be responding to Spring sunshine. Small fruits are clean and will be the more prolific for the dose of bone meal given and forked in during the Winter.

If I am asked how a blind man goes to work in a garden the answer is simple enough; with a few obvious modifications and adaptations his method is the same as that of any other gardener from Adam to Hodge. Patience and persistence being applied, the beginner will soon gain the necessary experience and,

by the aid of his own native wit, will readily develop his own peculiar method. I will venture a few "tips" that may prove useful.

I place much reliance upon my garden line ; this, be it confessed, is a relic of a past washing day . . . a clothes line attached to two cricket stumps. The latter serve as measuring rods and the clothes line is stout enough to be a ready guide. Digging, the operation of primary importance, I do with one foot on either side of the line, inserting the fork or spade at right angles to the line and turning the soil over to the right. My method of sowing seeds is to work a stride at a time. I make a drill with a dibber or other small tool, sprinkle the seed in thinly and evenly, cover it up, and then proceeding to the next stride, so complete the row. The line is changed to the position for the next row, measuring the requisite distance at each end and taking care that the rope does not hitch under a stone and thus spoil the effect when the seedlings appear. Hoeing is a most profitable operation, but the use of the long-handled tool must be left to the sighted worker ; I get equally good results by the use of a "cultivator," a tool consisting of three claws with barbed points. It has a short handle and its use, though it breeds a backache, is essential both to sweeten and aerate the soil, to retain the moisture, and to kill the weeds. The same tool is very effective for earthing up the potatoes, an operation also carried out astride the row of growing plants. Thinning out the seedlings needs patient work. The sighted gardener usually pulls them out in handfuls. I do not ; with such subjects as carrots and beet, I thin out just enough to allow the plants to stand singly, and repeat the process at intervals. By this means I get a succession of young succulent roots while my patient neighbour may be waiting for harvest time.

A cold frame is advantageous for the sake of earliness and to protect tender stuff from late frost, but it is not essential ; a box without a bottom and a sheet

of glass answers the purpose. The glass can be covered with rabbit wire for extra protection. I find it convenient to have my seed bed in a place apart, where I can have short rows of seedlings easy to manage.

Although I put my energies mainly into vegetable growing I also include a few rows of various flowers for cutting ; this is a line which can be followed according to the time available and the area of land, and the energy at one's disposal.

There are books about gardening printed in Braille which can be obtained from The National Institute for the Blind. The seedsmen's catalogue gives abundant information and there are "cultural directions on every packet" of seeds. Wireless talks on the subject are always helpful if one is not discouraged by counsels of perfection. Gardener friends are always ready to give help by gifts or exchanges of seeds or plants. There is, in short, plenty of assistance to be had, but, as in all other occupations, the results obtained will depend upon one's own good right arm and capacity for "sticking it." Books are good, but experience is the only teacher that has gained all the degrees. There is a fascination about gardening which never palls. No blind gardener will ever be liable to the mental deterioration which comes of having nothing to do. He cannot expect to produce stuff by the lorry load with his own unaided labour, but it is work that pays, in kind, in open-air health and in the satisfaction of producing good things.



A blind team competition at the Royal School for the Blind, Leatherhead. Prizes are given by the Guild for the best cultivated garden.

Mr. Frank Eyre at work in his garden at Rottingdean, Sussex.





Watering the garden—by sound.

Teaching the Young

By ADA BYRON.

TEACHING begins, as in any other blind training, by cultivating the sense of touch in order to distinguish one plant from another.

In order to make identification easier, it is necessary that blind children should be taught to recognise the commoner forest trees and shrubs by their leaves, and describe them in simple but accurate terms. Such adjectives as "cold," "large"—to name only two in common use among such children—are of little service in identification. For these should be substituted such adjectives as "hairy," "free from hairs," "strongly-veined," "circular," "oval," "divided," "long-stalked," etc.

Even in the case of the partially blind it is better for the pupil to cultivate the sense of touch rather than to rely on his defective sight, and there is no reason why a lad thus trained should not acquire speed, on ground to which he is accustomed, nearly equal to that of a normal sighted man. Take vegetables, for instance, the difference in the feel of their various leaves is very great indeed. Peas and beans have pairs of leaves growing opposite each other up the stems and they are soft to touch; onion leaves are long, pointed and narrow, carrots are feathery, and turnips have a rough surface. Cabbages, cauliflowers and winter greens feel fleshy and rather thick. If these differences are carefully learned, there will be little difficulty in identifying the common plants and vegetables.

The choice of suitable gardening tools is important. Short handled rakes and hoes are advisable, especially when several children are working close to one another. Long handles are nearly always unmanageable and it is much easier for children to work when they "get down to it." We have found that the most popular tool is the onion hoe, which has an 18-inch handle and a 3-inch to 6-inch blade.

The following is a rough programme for the year which can, of course, be adapted to suit the circumstances of the individual school or pupil :—

- January.** Digging and trenching. Prune fruit trees, plant deciduous trees and shrubs. Make your seed list.
- February.** Sow parsnips. Overhaul rock plants.
- March.** Try a few early peas in sheltered situation. Begin regular sowing of lettuce and radish. Early gladioli may be planted this month.
- April.** Regular sowings of vegetables. Dividing of herbaceous flowers should be completed.
- May.** Sow runner beans. Plant out vegetable marrows. Take cuttings from rock plants.
- June.** Plant out celery and keep it well watered. Keep hoe going regularly on vegetables and flowers. The activities for this month are endless.
- July.** Keep on hoeing. Plant out chrysanthemums and anything which flowers in the autumn.
- August.** Order bulbs. Earth up celery. Sow a few hardy annuals for early flowering.
- September.** Keep runner beans picked regularly. Plant early bulbs.
- October.** Plant bulbs. Clear all space possible.
- November.** Plant new roses unless in a low-lying district where spring planting is preferable. Start digging if weather conditions are suitable. Take soil test if doubtful of your ground and manure, lime or otherwise.
- December.** Keep on digging and trenching. When frost-bound wash pots and do odds and ends for which there is no time in the busy season.

We are sometimes asked how many pupils it is possible for one teacher to instruct at a time. No definite rule can be laid down. There are school gardens where five children are sufficient for a class ; on the other hand, as many as fifteen intelligent and

well-disciplined children can sometimes be handled by one competent teacher. Classes can be conducted on many different lines, the governing factors being the weather and the season. On wet days a theory class in the schoolroom is obviously the most suitable form of instruction. When the weather is favourable, practical instruction in the garden itself is the useful method of tuition.

A word of warning is necessary with regard to children suffering from progressive myopia. Overstrain must be carefully avoided. The progressive myope must not stoop or lift heavy weights, otherwise total blindness may ensue. This danger is fully recognised by the Guild and careful precautions are taken when a progressive myope is included in a gardening class. Such children are taught to crouch or squat in preference to stooping, and when a load of soil has to be transported it is wise to make two or three journeys with a partially filled basket. A red button should be attached to the coat or dress of these pupils as a constant reminder of their need for special care.

An interesting experiment in home teaching for blind children is being tried out by the Guild of Blind Gardeners. Some 150 children who have either recently left school, or who are attending schools where no gardening classes can be given in school hours, have been formed into a Junior Branch of the Guild. These children are provided with tools, plants, seeds and soil at reduced prices, and in some cases free, according to their circumstances. Most of these small gardeners live in poor urban districts, and their activities are often confined to window boxes. Whatever these children lack in materials they make up for in acumen. A great deal might be done by Home Teachers throughout the country to encourage a love of gardening among blind and partially blind children, and judging from our experience, any efforts in this direction will be well rewarded.

Appendix

The Guild of Blind Gardeners

THE Guild of Blind Gardeners was founded in January, 1921, to encourage the teaching of elementary horticulture among the blind and partially blind.

For the past 11 years the principal work of the Guild has been the holding of gardening classes for blind and partially blind children in and near London. Gardening classes are also organised by the Guild at the Royal School for the Blind at Leatherhead. Full-time instructors are employed by the Guild for this purpose. These instructors visit the schools in turn, each school receiving a visit once a week. The instruction is both practical and theoretical, and the Headmasters and Headmistresses are unanimous as to its value.

The following letter from the Head Teacher of an L.C.C. Myope School is typical of many which have been received:—

“ I have found gardening to exercise a very beneficial influence on the children, mentally, morally and physically.

1. MENTALLY.—The children see in gardening, more, I think, than in most occupations, how certainly effect follows cause, and result follows effort. Common-sense, perseverance, carefulness, patience and reasoning power, are some of the qualities brought out, and the pupils are trained in habits of co-operation and observation.

2. MORALLY.—When I first began to teach Myopic children I had a number of big boys, full of spirit and energy, but most troublesome and unreliable. I said, “ Boys, we will make a garden ! ” They brought picks, shovels, anything to break up the hard ground. In a fortnight we had sown some seed, in a month it had begun to grow and I never had any real trouble with those boys again, for the ringleaders in mischief became the most zealous of workers.

3. PHYSICALLY.—The wide open-air view is restful and beneficial to those who suffer from myopia, and the vigorous exercise in the fresh air helps to build up constitutions which are often somewhat delicate.”

Although no organisation exists at present for finding employment for partially blind boys and girls who have been trained by the Guild, posts have been found for a few of them on farms or with horticultural firms. The experiment has been completely successful, as the following typical letters testify :—

From J.S.

“ My first job was on a farm at Coventry. I was there 12 months. Then I stayed about home for awhile and then I went on a farm at Redditch where I was for 3 months. From there I went to work on a Sports Ground where I stayed 2 years. It was at Shepherds Bush. Then my present job in a big private garden in Ealing as an assistant gardener. I’ve been here 9 months. *I have been keeping myself for the last two years.*”

From a florist in Upper Richmond Road, Putney.

“ The boy G.L. was in my employ for 15 months. He left me to go under Mr. R., gardener at ———, where he remained about 2 years. He left Mr. R. to go under a friend, Mr. W., last Spring, and I believe he is giving every satisfaction. During the time he was with me we found him satisfactory in every way and I did not find that his eyesight interfered with his work in any way. He was a real good boy and took a great interest in all his duties and was anxious to learn all there was to learn about gardening. Mr. R. gladly took him at 5s. a week more than I paid him. Mr. R. wanted to push him on and recommended him to Mr. W. who gave him 15s. a week rise, so that at 18 years of age G.L. is drawing 35s. a week, not bad for a lad and, in my opinion, speaks for itself.”

Guild Membership.

Membership of the Guild is open to any registered blind person on payment of 1s. Blind members are supplied with seeds and tools by the Guild at half the ordinary retail prices up to £2 in any one year. The Guild also issues literature for the instruction of blind adults who cannot attend classes.

A Junior Branch of the Guild was founded in 1931. This is mainly composed of boys and girls of school age who are receiving instruction and help from the Guild in window box and pot culture at their homes.

Exhibits by blind members of the Guild are on view annually at the Royal Horticultural Society’s Great Spring Show and the National Rose Society’s Chelsea Show, which is held the first week in July. At the latter Show, a large tent is devoted to exhibits of flowers and vegetables grown by members of the Guild. This tent has been honoured by several visits from Her Majesty The Queen, who has expressed her keen interest in the Guild’s work.

Finance

The Guild of Blind Gardeners receives a grant of £100 per annum from the National Institute for the Blind. Its income from investments amounts to £30 a year. The Guild has no other source of income apart from donations and annual subscriptions. A sum of approximately £600 has to be raised annually to maintain the work of the Guild at its present level.

It is anticipated the the publication of this booklet will lead to a wide extension of the Guild's work and a consequent increase in expenditure. The collection of the necessary funds is a constant source of anxiety to the Committee and it is hoped that many new sympathisers will come forward to assist this beneficent work. Help can be given in the following ways :—

1. By sending a donation.
2. By teaching a blind man or woman how to cultivate a small garden or allotment.
3. By employing boys and girls with defective sight who have been trained by the Guild.
4. By offering a plot of ground to the Guild for the use of its blind members.
5. By spreading information about the Guild to blind people and friends.

Donations and offers of assistance will be most gratefully received by Sir Harry Cordeaux, K.C.M.G., C.B., Hon. Treasurer, or The Secretary, Guild of Blind Gardeners, c/o The National Institute for the Blind, 224, Great Portland Street, W.1.



DONATION FORM

To Sir Harry Cordeaux, K.C.M.G., C.B.,
Hon. Treasurer, Guild of Blind Gardeners,
224, Great Portland Street, London, W.I.



I enclose a donation of £ : : : : :
Guild of Blind Gardeners. towards the funds of the

Name.....

Address.....

Date.....

HV1711 Sutcliffe, J. Ernest.
N213 Gardening for the Blind.
Su83

DATE DUE	
HV1711 Sutcliffe, J. Ernest. N213 Gardening for the Blind. Su83	
TITLE	
DATE DUE	BORROWER'S NAME

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10011

N.I.B. BULLETIN No. 1

EMPLOYMENT OF THE BLIND

EMPLOYMENT OF BLIND PERSONS IN ORDINARY
FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS

SUB-CONTRACTING AS A MEANS OF FINDING NEW
OCCUPATIONS

PRICE 3d.

N.I.B. BULLETIN No. 2

MUSEUMS AND THE BLIND

PRICE 3d.

